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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BOGOTA 002434

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [SNAR](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [CO](#) [AUC](#)

SUBJECT: GOC CONTINUING TO CONFRONT PARAMILITARIES

REF: BOGOTA 1680

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood, Reasons: 1.5 B & D.

1. (C) Summary: In the face of AUC and other paramilitary groups' failure to fulfill the unilateral cease-fire pledge (reftel), the security forces continue to confront paramilitaries throughout the country. Since the beginning of 2003, almost 3,000 paramilitaries have been captured, killed, or have deserted. Law enforcement agencies have targeted paramilitary drug trafficking rings and at least four mid-level commanders have been arrested in the past two months. Orders to confront the paramilitaries come from the highest levels of the Uribe administration, including the President himself. End Summary.

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Military Operations  
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2. (C) The military has aggressively confronted paramilitary groups nationwide despite the ongoing peace process with the three largest paramilitary groups. The Security and Democracy Foundation, a respected, independent think-tank, reports that the number of offensive operations against the paramilitaries has more than doubled from 2002 to 2003 and the death rate during these confrontations has increased from 1.2 to 1.5 paramilitary combatants per operation. Although the military conducts more offensive operations against the FARC, operations against the paramilitaries have increased at a faster rate, 2002-2003.

3. (C) The Colombian military reports that so far in 2004, 526 arms (long and short), 344 pieces of equipment, and 175 explosive devices have been seized in operations against paramilitaries. These operations freed eight civilian prisoners and prevented one civilian assassination. 108 paramilitaries have been killed, 426 captured or arrested, and 59 have deserted. Results from 2003 are similar: 1,482 arms, 1,446 pieces of equipment, and 261 explosive devices were seized. The latter operations resulted in 61 civilian prisoners being freed. 328 paramilitaries were killed, 1,717 captured or arrested, and 242 deserted. A total of 2,880 paramilitaries have been removed from the battlefield since 2003. (Note: the number of captured paramilitaries is lower than the 4,000 or so that the Ministry of Defense reports. This discrepancy could be caused by the Ministry's failure to subtract detainees released immediately following an operation because of a lack of evidence. End Note).

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Law Enforcement Attacks  
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4. (C) The GOC also has employed a variety of law enforcement tools against paramilitaries. For example:

-- In late January 2004, Colombian authorities participated in an international operation to dismantle a paramilitary-Italian mafia money laundering and drug trafficking ring. Over 110 criminals were arrested in six countries, including at least 15 Colombians. Forty additional arrest warrants have been issued in Colombia.

-- On February 2, 23 paramilitaries were arrested in Cali as the result of a six-month investigation led by the Department of Administrative Security (DAS, roughly FBI equivalent).

-- In September 2003, Colombian authorities began seizing over U.S. \$3 million worth of assets belonging to AUC commander Hernan Giraldo Serna, who is responsible for a large percentage of the drug trafficking in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta region.

-- In January 2003, a judge in Becerril, Cesar Department was murdered by paramilitaries. The Prosecutor General's Office (Fiscalia), with U.S. financial and logistical support, launched a three-month investigation, which resulted in 37 arrests related to paramilitary corruption led by AUC commander Rodrigo Tovar. The U.S. has helped fund at least 25 such investigations against Colombia's illegal armed groups since 2002.

5. (C) In the past two months, at least four mid-level paramilitary commanders have been captured, including the alleged second-in-command of the AUC's Calima Bloc, a Middle

Magdalena Group commander involved in gasoline theft, and the second-in-command of the AUC's Heroes of Gauliva Bloc that operates near Bogota.

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Commitment From the Highest Levels  
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16. (C) The Uribe administration is committed to confronting the paramilitaries. In addition to the police operations listed above, President Uribe has ordered GOC military efforts against the paramilitaries. Uribe's current Armed Forces Commander and former Army Commander, General Ospina, has aggressively carried out the administration's military objectives, and the Procuraduria has noted the military's high level of cooperation under Ospina. Army Commander General Carreno directed successful operations against paramilitary-dominated areas when he was Second Division Commander in 2002 and has continued to do so in his current position. Vice President Francisco Santos has publicly criticized the paramilitaries for failing to observe the cease-fire and underscored that the GOC will not tolerate violations. Peace Commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo has encouraged the military to combat the paramilitaries despite the complications these operations have caused for peace negotiations.

WOOD